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ABSTRACT

An assumptive, theoretical, and empirical foundation for the development of a formal dissemination model to apply to the introduction of information about educational accountability programs is set forth. If a dissemination model is to be effective, the fundamental assumptions underlying it must be spelled out explicitly. Existing communication problems can often be traced to mistaken assumptions about the nature, and purpose of the communication process. The success or failure of a formal dissemination model also hinges upon identification of relevant sociological, psychological, and communication theories. A useful theory allows transcendence, at least to some extent, of the exigencies of a particular communication situation and allows prediction of the probable outcomes of a specific communicative strategy in other similar situations. Although not an inventory of research findings, certain studies are described and certain results are cited when they are perceived as bearing upon: problems associated with present attempts to disseminate information about educational accountability and/or dimensions of the formal dissemination model being developed. (RC)

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COOPERATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

Part II

The Relationship of Contemporary Communication Theory to Accountability Dissemination Procedures

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for state accountability programs

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A DISSEMINATION SYSTEM FOR STATE ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAMS

PART II

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNICATION THEORY TO ACCOUNTABILITY DISSEMINATION PROCEDURES

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Denver, Colorado
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PREFACE

There can be no doubt that today's educators are "accountability conscious." Numerous articles and texts have appeared in recent years discussing the topic, and the agenda of most regional and national education conferences are likely to include presentations devoted to accountability. Several state legislatures have passed laws requiring accountability programs, and many states have laws requiring "assessment" programs.

These accountability programs offer a unique approach to educational planning based in part on statements of educational goals and objectives with proper attention directed toward cost benefit analyses. However, accountability programs will make positive contributions to education only if the information generated from them is understood and utilized by citizens, educators, legislators, and other audiences. Unfortunately, the practical and theoretical guidelines necessary for accountability dissemination do not seem to be available at this time.

The Michigan Department of Education, working with the Cooperative Accountability Project (an ESEA, Title V project of the Colorado Department of Education), has attempted to fill this informational void in the production of this three-part document, A Dissemination System for State Accountability Programs. This dissemination system will not present designs for report forms or informational booklets to be used by state accountability programs. It will, instead, present interpretations of the overall communication task presented by the inititation of accountability programs and the typical communication pit-falls created by the programs. An understanding of these areas will hopefully permit the reader achieve a better appreciation of the importance of quality dissemination activities and the general manner in which such activities should be designed. This paper, Part II of the series, is devoted to an analysis of relevant communication theories as they are related to problems of dissemination of information from educational accountability programs.

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Accountability Dissemination Project
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PART II

THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONTEMPORARY COMMUNICATION THEORY TO ACCOUNTABILITY DISSEMINATION PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

In Part I of this report, the authors described certain problems arising when educational accountability models are introduced into a state. Part II discusses some of these problems within the context of current communication theory. In particular, we will set forth an assumptive, a theoretical, and an empirical foundation for the development of a formal dissemination model to apply to the introduction of information about educational accountability programs.

Each of the three bases--assumptive, theoretical, and empirical--are crucial to the development of a viable, useful model. When people interact, they bring to the communication arena certain unstated, implicit assumptions that influence their view of the process in which they are engaged. Differing assumptions foster different message behaviors and different communicative outcomes. If a dissemination model is to be effective, the fundamental assumptions underlying it must be spelled out explicitly. Moreover, existing problems of communication can often be traced to mistaken assumptions about the nature, and purpose, of the communication process.

The success or failure of a formal dissemination model also hinges upon identification of relevant sociological, psychological, and communication theories. A useful theory permits us to transcend, at least to some extent, the exigencies of a particular communication situation and allows us to predict the probable outcomes of a specific communicative strategy in other similar situations. Without this power

to generalize that is conferred by theory, we would be reduced to devising a unique communicative strategy for each individual and for every specific situation. While no extant theory permits blanket generalizations--in other words, while we must still be concerned about providing different communicative strokes for different communicative folks--there are several theories which enable us to make useful probability statements about the consequences of various dissemination strategies.

Finally, as Homans has asserted, "our findings are our most enduring possessions."[1] Any dissemination model worth its informative and persuasive salt must take account of research findings relating to the important variables of the model. Thus, although this portion of the report is not conceived of as an inventory of research findings nor as a critical review of studies dealing with particular problem areas, we will describe certain studies and cite certain results when they are perceived as bearing upon: (1) problems associated with present attempts to disseminate information about educational accountability and/or (2) dimensions of the formal dissemination model that will be developed in our next report. Readers who are interested in pursuing these topics to greater depth may refer to the selected references listed in APPENDIX A.

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[1]George C. Homans, Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1961), p. 9.

CHAPTER I

ASSUMPTIVE FOUNDATIONS OF A FORMAL DISSEMINATION MODEL

Assumption: Behavioral Effects

Why do people communicate? Contained within the seeds of this deceptively simple question is the first assumption undergirding an effective dissemination model--or for that matter, any communicative transaction. Stated succinctly, we communicate to influence the behavior of others. As Berlo puts it:

> In short, we communicate to influence--to affect with intent. In analyzing communication, in trying to improve our communication ability, the first question we need to ask is, what did the communicator intend to have happen as a result of his message? What was he trying to accomplish in terms of his environment? As a result of his communication, what did he want people to believe, to be able to do, to say? In psychological terms, what response was he trying to obtain?[2]

Once formally articulated, this people-centered assumption of purposive behavioral effects hardly seems earth-shattering. Intellectually it makes perfectly good sense to say that people seek to influence behavior when communicating. Of course, the array of behavioral effects sought are often numerous and complex. The printed marks on these sheets of paper (messages) are intended, among other things, to bring about the following behavioral consequences: achieve financial reward for the authors (message sources), enhance the authors' credibility, heighten readers' sensitivity about the problems involved in communicating information about educational accountability, and affect the actual communi-

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[2]David K. Berlo, The Process of Communication (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 12.

cative behaviors of readers charged with disseminating such information. Moreover, the ways that messages are constructed influence receivers' perceptions of the primary behavioral motivations of the message source. For instance, it would be interesting to know how many readers have unconsciously concluded that our major motive for writing these reports is to make money, solely because we listed that behavioral outcome first. Furthermore, when we do not specify the kinds of behavioral effects sought, receivers will almost invariably infer some intended effect on the basis of their own perceptions of the situation. Thus, a source may not wish to create more negative attitudes about the quality of a school system by releasing the results of assessment for the system's pupils, but if there exists ambiguity about his aim, individuals who are highly ego-involved with the school system (parents of students, board members, administrators, and teachers) are likely to "read" this intention into the source's message behavior.

To say that the behavioral effects assumption, when stated, is intellectually self-evident does not imply that practicing communicators are consistently guided by it. Quite the contrary, certain historical and sociological pressures push many communicators toward reliance upon an alternative, mistaken assumption; namely, the purpose of communication is to construct messages. While these pressures have been discussed

elsewhere, a brief review of several of the more significant ones is warranted.[3]

First, until relatively recently, formal training in communication skills has been grounded in a message construction, rather than a behavioral effects assumption. Recall your own experiences as a student of oral and written communication. How much time did you spend learning to diagram sentences correctly? How many hours were devoted to writing "proper," "correct" paragraphs? How long did it take you to overcome your phobia against inexact parallelism in outlining a communication (for after all, a correct outline has symmetrical parallel structure)? Note that all of these concerns center on properties of the message; they do not deal with the ways that receivers may be affected by messages. Indeed, for the typical product of this kind of communication skills training, the only relevant receiver was probably the teacher, since he or she had the power to reward or punish the student for his message construction efforts.

All of this is not to say, of course, that a concern for construction of messages is totally unrelated to the behavioral impact of communication. Since many receivers have themselves been taught the importance of constructing "correct" messages, deviations from the prescriptive rules they have learned are likely to have deleterious effects on

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[3]For example, see: Miller, Gerald R. "Some Assumptive Barriers to Effective Communication." Michigan Journal of Secondary Education 8(1966): 17-24 or Miller, Gerald R. "Communication: Some Mistaken Assumptions." Planning Community Junior College Facilities: A Look Into the Twenty-first Century. Edited by Floyd G. Parker and Max S. Smith, East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University, 1968.

perceived source credibility. Thus, should this paper contain numerous instances of "incorrect" grammar, many misspellings, and a surplus of grammatical "errors," your perceptions of our credibility would likely suffer. Note, however, three important qualifications to this statement: first, that message construction is viewed as a means toward the end of purposively influencing your response, not as an end in itself; second, that the prescriptive rules of message construction are only one of numerous factors we may have to consider if we hope to be successful in influencing your behavior; and third, that some receivers may remain relatively unaffected by violations of prescriptive rules; in fact, for certain receivers, violation of these rules may sometimes heighten the behavioral impact of the message.

The sociological climate of large formal organizations is the second culprit to be considered. Such a climate frequently encourages the mistaken assumption that the purpose of communication is to construct messages, rather than to purposively affect behavior. Usually, it is easier to count the number of messages a person constructs than to assess the number of people positively affected by the messages. As a result, the plaudit, <u>good communicator</u>, is often bestowed on the most prolific creators of messages. Through some mysterious process, an eighty page report comes to be defined as twice as good as a forty page one; in a similar vein, ten, two-page memos daily are seen as obviously superior to five. Whether anyone's behavior is positively affected by reading the report or the memoranda--or for that matter, whether anyone even reads them--may remain a moot question.

Obviously, these kinds of pressures are particularly germane to a broadly based project such as the development of a statewide system for disseminating information about educational accountability. Any project of this magnitude makes demands on the communicative ingenuity of many individuals, most of whom are members of large formal organizations. In our review of some of the problems arising when statewide accountability models are introduced, presented in Part I of this report, we had no difficulty assembling numerous messages about the pros and cons of such models. What does seem to be noticeably lacking is systematic assessment of the behavioral effects of these messages on relevant receivers. While many factors undoubtedly contribute to this shortage of evaluative feedback, the mistaken, message construction assumption is probably one important cause, since "the tendency to gauge communication effectiveness by message output is pervasive; it is an inclination that must be continuously checked."[4]

When one accepts the more defensible assumption that the purpose of communication is to influence the behavior of others, the complex problems associated with the development of an effective dissemination model are clearly underscored. In particular the existence of multiple groups of relevant receivers, each group possessing different levels of expertise, varying attitudes, and conflicting meanings for the whole notion of accountability, points to the need for a model capable of

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[4]Miller, "Some Assumptive Barriers to Effective Communication," p. 20.

generating a variety of messages, with each message tailored for a particular target audience.

In Part I of this report, we contended that "the 'general public' is not a large, unseparable mass of individuals, but rather consists of various separate and distinct groups of individuals possessing various backgrounds, needs, and concerns." In addition, we analyzed the responses to educational accountability models, particularly those involving assessment, of such diverse clienteles as teachers, education associations, educational testing specialists, school administrators, school board members, news media, state and local government agencies, parents, and taxpayers. Obviously, some messages calculated to influence positively the behavior of certain publics are doomed to failure for others; for instance, the esoteric statistical arguments of two testing specialists are likely to fall on uncomprehending taxpayer ears. That there exists an awareness of such problems is attested to by the concern for identifying the most meaningful statistical format for reporting assessment testing to parents and taxpayers. If a dissemination model is to be effective, such a receiver orientation must permeate all message decisions.

Assumption: Meanings Are in Words

The second assumption necessary for an effective dissemination model can be stated as follows: meanings are in people, not in words. Again, upon reflection, this assertion is far from startling. Most psycholinguistic theories of meaning deal with meaning as something that

happens inside the individual between the presentation of some overt stimulus and the performance of some overt response.[5] Given such a theoretic view, it is obviously erroneous to speak of words having meaning. These typewritten marks have no meaning in themselves; rather, each reader must supply meanings for them. It is probably unnecessary to point out that the meanings elicited will frequently vary widely from reader to reader. In short, words do not mean--people mean.

Still, communicators often fall prey to the mistaken alternative assumption that meaning is a property of words. Why do we commit this glaring error? For one thing, our ordinary language habits engender the belief that words mean things. How often have you heard such queries and comments as the following: "What does the term 'educational accountability' mean?" "What is the correct meaning of the word 'education'?" "The dictionary gives us the various meanings of a word." "If he doesn't know the right meaning of that word, it's not my fault." Even our typical linguistic approaches to stipulating a definition obscure, or misplace, the locus of meaning. When stating a definition, people typically say, "Educational accountability is..." rather than, "When I use the term 'educational accountability, I mean..." The former phrasing mistakenly implies that meaning is in the words themselves, while the latter correctly places it in the person stipulating the definition.

To say that people vary in the meanings they supply for words does not necessitate communicative anarchy. There certainly exist areas

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[5]For example, see Terwilliger, Robert F. Meaning and Mind. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.

of shared meanings; many people respond similarly to a host of verbal stimuli. Thus, while the dictionary does not "give us the various meanings of a word," it does report some commonly shared meanings held by members of our society. But even these shared meanings are only partial; they do not capture the total meaning that any individual assigns to a particular word or concept. Furthermore, such reports of common usage pertain primarily to denotative meanings, rather than to the connotative, or affective dimension of meaning. Consequently, two or more persons may share common denotative elements, while differing widely in the connotative meanings that they assign to the term. This commonsense observation points up the glaring weakness of the utopian assumption made by some general semanticists that all problems are merely verbal.[6] For two persons may understand perfectly well their respective denotative meanings for a term such as "assessment testing" and still disagree on the desirability of such a program--in other words, disagree on the connotative meanings they assign to the term.

Communication problems are created when the mistaken assumption that meanings are in words guides the transactions of a communication source. First, the source may fall victim to the so-called "bucket theory of meaning." The bucket theory suggests that meaning is some sort of portable commodity, and that the task of a communicator is to load a

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[6]For example, see: Lee, Irving J. Language Habits in Human Affairs. New York: Harper, 1941 or Hayakawa, S.I. Language in Thought and Action. 3rd ed. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Javanovich, 1972.

bucket with meanings, transport these meanings to the appropriate receivers; and, metaphorically, "dump them" into the receivers' heads. This fallacious notion is so pervasive that even students of communication have fallen prey to it. For example, one widely-read book about communication begins with the assertion: "Communication is a word that describes the process [note that this phrasing implies that the word, "communication," has a property of meaning] of transferring meaning from one individual to another."[7]

When two or more people communicate, meanings are not transferred. Instead, the source selects from some finite set of words for which he has certain meanings. If he is guided by the assumption that meanings are in people, he will endeavor to predict the meanings his receivers will have for these words--i.e., he will be receiver-oriented and he will choose words that are most likely to elicit meanings harmonious with his desired behavioral outcomes. A source who realizes that meanings are not in words will be aware that "educational accountability" does not have a meaning: that a testing specialist, a local school board member, a teacher, and a taxpayer will have different meanings for the term "educational accountability."

If the source fails prey to the assumption that meanings are in words, he is also more vulnerable to what David Berlo has called the "I told them" fallacy.[8] This fallacy occurs whenever a communication breakdown

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[7]Robert Cathcart, Post Communication: Criticism and Evaluation Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966 , p. 1.

[8]David Berlo, The Process of Communication, pp. 176-177.

is rationalized by asserting: "I don't know why the members of the PTA didn't understand that low testing scores do not necessarily indicate an inferior school system or a waste of taxpayers' money. After all, I told them there was no necessary relationship." But perhaps the words selected for "telling them" did not trigger the meanings that the source desired. For example, the statement, "It would be premature to assume low test scores are indicative of a substandard school system," may mean no necessary relationship to the source and an attempt to avoid facing the issue to the receivers. Even further afield, the assertion, "Let's not jump to any conclusions about these scores," may mean lack of demonstrated relationships to the source and a "cop-out" to the receivers. If such differences do occur, it may soothe the source's ego to exclaim "I told them!" but it does not remedy the breakdown resulting from these disparate meanings. Moreover, the situation is further complicated if the source is incapable of identifying the reasons for the breakdown, if he continues to cling to the assumption that meanings are in words and that his chief task is to find the correct words to utilize in his messages.

In the literature dealing with accountability models, we detect that an assumptive problem of meaning has arisen in the frequent tendency of some groups of receivers to equate the terms "educational accountability" and "assessment" or "testing." Several writers have taken great pains to make the point that "educational accountability" does not mean only "assessment." Such a statement misses the central issue: the term "educational accountability" does not mean anything; instead,

people have meanings for it. Like it or not, "assessment" appears to be the meaning that many persons have acquired for "educational accountability." Thus, a successful dissemination model must suggest strategies for changing this meaning or must devise ways of communicating effectively within the realm of the present meanings that receivers hold. Both alternatives are more likely to succeed if all communication is guided by the assumption that the locus of meaning is in people.

Assumption: Subjective Reality

A third assumptive foundation essential to an effective dissemination model deals with the nature of reality itself. Succinctly stated, this assumption holds that reality is subjective--in other words, we structure our own reality. In structuring reality, we make it conform with our motives, beliefs, attitudes, and values. The furniture of the world is pliable and is easily molded to meet the exigencies of any particular situation.

Numerous studies have documented man's tendency to structure a psychologically compatible reality. Motivated by a sincere concern to reduce bigotry and tolerance, Cooper and Jahoda prepared a series of cartoons about an imaginary character named "Mr. Bigot." Their intent in the cartoons was to lampoon and ridicule Bigot, to demonstrate the irrationality of his prejudice. For example, one cartoon shows Bigot in a hospital bed, bandaged like a mummy and obviously at death's door. A nurse is approaching the bed with a bottle of blood plasma. Reacting

characteristically, Bigot asserts, "If it isn't at least sixth generation American, take it away!"[9]

This cartoon, as well as similar ones, was shown to groups of relatively prejudiced and relatively unprejudiced individuals, the expectation being that the prejudiced persons would gain an inkling of their own silly behavior by observing the carryings-on of Mr. Bigot. Unfortunately, such an outcome did not occur. When asked the purpose, or meaning, of the cartoons, the relatively unprejudiced viewers stated that it was to ridicule unthinking bigotry. By contrast, hardly any of the relatively prejudiced people reached this conclusion. Many of them sought to disassociate themselves from Mr. Bigot (one person actually remarked, "Sounds like a social climber to me. I'm eighth generation American myself."); others interpreted the cartoons in strange, idiosyncratic ways; while still others professed an inability to comprehend these comparatively simple messages. In other words, the relatively prejudiced viewers took great pain to structure the environment so as to leave their self-esteem intact; they constructed a very different "reality" than their relatively unprejudiced counterparts.

This tendency of receivers to distort, ignore, or avoid incoming messages that do not conform with their worldview poses a serious problem for a dissemination model which seeks to communicate information effectively to a large, extremely heterogeneous group of receivers. As we

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[9]Eunice Cooper and Marie Jahoda, "The Evasion of Propaganda: How Prejudiced People React to Anti-Prejudice Propaganda," Journal of Psychology 23(1947): 15-25.

shall see in the next section of this report, most theories of cognitive consistency posit a principle of selective exposure to information: people expose themselves to information that conforms with their beliefs and attitudes, while avoiding information that is attitudinally discrepant.[10] To the extent that this desire to maintain a neat, psychologically consistent picture of reality actually holds, it presents a formidable challenge to communication sources who traffic in belief-discrepant information initially at odds with receivers' beliefs.

Certainly, a source who forgets the subjectivity of reality is ill-equipped to meet this challenge. Again, of course, we are all intellectually aware that our transactions with the environment are subjective. But when we communicate with others, this fact is sometimes overlooked. Instead, reality is viewed as objective; the assumption is made that what exists "out there" for us is interpreted in precisely the same way by everyone else. Suddenly, however, a receiver responds to a communication in a manner at odds with our intent. What is the matter with him? After all, the situation is perfectly clear, and the "facts" are there for anyone to see. The receiver's perceptual equipment has apparently run afoul.

To assume an objective reality makes it difficult, if not impossible, for a communicator to empathize with his receivers. Empathy requires the ability to take the role of the other--to see the world through his intellectual and emotional windows. To assume an objective

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[10]For example, see: Freedman, Jonathan L. and Sears, David O. "Selective Exposure." Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. Vol. II. Edited by Leonard Berkowitz. New York: Academic Press, 1965 and Abelson, Robert P., et al., ed. Theories of Cognitive Consistency: A Sourcebook. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968.

reality implies that the emotional and intellectual states of others are always synonymous with one's own. If this were true, communication would be much easier--indeed, largely unnecessary--albeit less challenging and exciting. Administrators, teachers, testing specialists, and taxpayers would perceive educational accountability programs identically and there would be no need to try to accommodate divergent viewpoints. Since such perceptual harmony does not exist, empathy is an essential ingredient of effective communication. In turn, successful empathizers are those sources--whether individuals or collective agencies--who have erased the assumption of objective reality from their cognitive blackboards.

In developing a formal dissemination model, we are dealing with receivers who reflect all shades of psychological and social reality. In fact, the subjective reality assumption is probably the most fundamental of the three assumptive foundations undergirding the dissemination model. Once this assumption becomes a given for all message strategy decisions, it is easier to remember that the purpose of communication is to affect behavior purposively, not to construct messages, and that meanings are in people, rather than in words. In fact all three defensible assumptions, as well as their erroneous antitheses, are inextricably bound together; they are related, not discrete.

All three assumptions illustrate the importance of multiple feedback loops in any viable model of dissemination. How can behavioral effects be assessed without monitoring receivers' behavior and seeking information about their responses to messages? When sources and receivers have widely disparate meanings for terms, how are these

differences to be identified and, hopefully, resolved? How are others' perceptions of reality to be discovered and assessed? The answer to each of these questions is clear: to maximize effective communication, feedback must be solicited from all relevant groups of receivers. In Part I of this report, we indicated just one aspect of the problem, the fact that no systematic studies of the attitudes of parents and taxpayers toward the Michigan Educational Assessment Program have been conducted. Without such data, formulation of messages strategies for communicating with this segment of the public is difficult. Moreover, as we have indicated, such studies constitute only first steps. If communicative efforts are to bear attitudinal and behavorial fruits, continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms are essential ingredients of a dissemination model.

Taken together, the three assumptions discussed in this section point to the transactional nature of the communication process. Typically, we have thought of communication as a linear, unidirectional process involving an attempt by one person (a source) to influence the behavior of another (a receiver or receivers). While we have employed the terms "source" and "receiver" in this report for analytic purposes, we realize that, in its richest sense, communication involves mutual interaction by two or more "communicators." Communication does not end when a single message is sent or received; instead, all parties to the transaction exercise some behavioral influence on each other. Naturally, supporters of accountability programs strive to gain acceptance of these programs on the part of various relevant publics. But in assessing the responses of these publics to their messages, the supporters themselves will modify

their attitudes, message strategies, and perhaps elements of the accountability programs themselves. The end result of such an extended communication transaction will hopefully be a favorable attitudinal climate for accountability programs that are calculated to serve the educational needs and professional objectives of the various relevant publics.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A FORMAL DISSEMINATION MODEL

Thus far, we have considered only the broad, assumptive bases of a formal dissemination model. As indicated above, the success of such a model also depends upon the incorporation of relevant behavioral theories that permit prediction about probable message consequences. In this section of the report, we deal with several such theories. We shall first sketch the framework of each of the theories and then consider how it applies to the problem at hand: the dissemination of information about educational accountability programs.

Cognitive Consistency Theories

The label, cognitive consistency, embraces a family of psychological theories, including balance theory,[11] the congruity principle,[12] cognitive dissonance,[13] cognitive balance,[14] structural balance,[15] and

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[11]See: Heider, Fritz. The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations. New York: Wiley, 1958 and Newcomb, Theodore M. "An Approach to the Study of Communicative Acts." Psychological Review 60(1953): 393-404.

[12]See: Osgood, Charles E. and Tannenbaum, Percy H. "The Principle of Congruity in the Prediction of Attitude Change." Psychological Review 62(1955): 42-55.

[13]See: Festinger, Leon. A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson, 1957.

[14]See: Rosenberg, Milton J. "A Structural Theory of Attitude Dynamics." Public Opinion Quarterly 24(1960): 319-340.

[15]See: Feather, N.T. "A Structural Balance Model of Communication Effects." Psychological Review 71(1964): 291-313.

belief congruence.[16] Although each of the theories differs in certain ways, they are all based on a common core of postulates. The three most important postulates are as follows:

(1) Man strives for a state of cognitive consistency; i.e., he seeks psychological consistency among his beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

(2) The introduction of inconsistency into the cognitive system is psychologically unpleasant; i.e., inconsistency functions as an aversive drive state.

(3) As a result of this aversive drive state, the individual will be motivated to behave in some way calculated to restore cognitive consistency.

Consider two relatively simple examples of the dynamic process of maintaining consistency. At times, inconsistency may result from a violation of expectation; for example, a potential message receiver may discover that he has not been privy to certain decisions, when in fact he feels that he should have been consulted. Suppose that a specialist in educational testing discovers that a new set of standardized tests has been developed and that his views have not been sought. Both the cognition that he is an expert in this area and the cognition that he is interested in improving the educational system are inconsistent with the cognition that his advice was not solicited. In order to reduce his inconsistency, he is likely to question the quality of the standardized tests. Thus, negative consequences of cognitive inconsistency may some-

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[16] See: Rokeach, Milton and Rothman, George. "The Principle of Belief Congruence and the Congruity Principle As Models of Cognitive Interaction." Psychological Review 72(1965): 128-142.

times result from an absence of preliminary communication.

Consider next a hypothetical situation involving a taxpayer who has consistently supported educational programs in his community and has always voted "Yes" on millage proposals. Since support of these proposals is financially taxing, our taxpayer must possess numerous other cognitions if he is to maintain cognitive consistency: he must believe that education is a good investment, that increased funds are necessary to the maintenance of educational excellence, that his own school system is excellent, that money is not being wasted, etc. As long as all of his cognitions are consistent with his knowledge that he is paying a substantial property tax to support the schools, he is faced with no problems.

One evening, however, he opens his newspaper and discovers that the school children in his community have performed substandardly on a battery of assessment tests. This information creates cognitive inconsistency: on the one hand, he realizes he is paying high school taxes; on the other, he has just been informed that these high taxes have not translated themselves into high test scores. Since the theory predicts that his inconsistency will be psychologically unpleasant, our taxpayer should do something to restore consistency.

Here arises one of the thorny problems for cognitive consistency theories, since there are many possible avenues for reducing inconsistency open to our taxpayer. He may question the credibility of the tests, seeking out information to indicate that they are invalid, unreliable measures of learning. He may add new cognitions concerning the overall purposes of education, thus enabling him to minimize the impor-

tance of performance on a few standardized tests. He may demand the firing and replacement of the superintendent of schools, the principals, or a substantial portion of the faculty. He may lead a campaign to oust incumbent board members at the next election, or even to recall them. The list of alternatives is formidable, and in their broad outlines, cognitive consistency theories do not tell us which approach will be selected.

The importance of being able to identify the likely mode of inconsistency reduction looms particularly important when these theories are applied to communication transactions. Given a consistency framework, any communication can be viewed as having two functions: (1) the arousal of cognitive inconsistency, and (2) specification of a particular means of inconsistency reduction.[17] Obviously, the first function can be accomplished rather easily, for it is usually possible to identify relevant belief-discrepant information with which to confront the message recipient. The tricky communication problem arises in inducing the receiver to adopt the particular mode of inconsistency reduction advocated in the message. Suppose, for instance, that our hypothetical taxpayer does not encounter the information about assessment testing scores in his newspaper, but instead, in a message distributed by an organization dedicated to electing a new slate of school board members. In such circumstances, the communicative objective of the organization is twofold: first, to trigger cognitive inconsistency by introducing belief-

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[17] Gerald R. Miller and Murray A. Hewgill, "Some Recent Research in Fear Arousing Message Appeals," Speech Monographs 28(1966): 377-391.

discrepant information about test scores; second, to persuade our taxpayer to reduce inconsistency by voting the incumbent board members out-of-office.

To generalize from this specific case, then, one means of reducing cognitive inconsistency generated by incoming communications is to accept the message recommendations advocated by the source. Naturally, communicators always hope that this mode of inconsistency reduction will be chosen by their receivers. If one is trying to sell a particular product or promulgate a particular policy, little is gained by merely motivating the receiver to behave; rather, for communication to be successful, he must behave in a particular way, namely, by buying the product or supporting the policy.

The receiver may also reduce cognitive inconsistency by derogating the message source. If the source can be labeled untrustworthy and/or incompetent, the veracity of his information or the cogency of his reasoning is called into question, thus invalidating his message. We will discuss this possibility more thoroughly in the following section of this report, when we discuss the important variable of source credibility.

Inconsistency can also be reduced by distorting message content. We have already illustrated this mode of inconsistency reduction in analyzing the reactions of prejudiced individuals to the "Mr. Bigot" cartoons. When asked the purpose of the cartoons, many of these people responded with interpretations that illustrated distortion of message content. In a similar vein, a study by Manis revealed that fraternity

supporters perceive messages about fraternities as more pro-fraternity than do anti-fraternity receivers, and that both groups perceive the messages as more controversial than do uncommitted, neutral persons.[18] Thus, given certain initial attitudes, our hypothetical taxpayer may interpret the purpose of the message as providing information about school board candidates, rather than arguing for election of a particular slate.

Finally, inconsistency may be reduced by adding new information to counteract the belief-discrepant cognition. Our taxpayer may ferret out data revealing the apparent invalidity of the assessment tests used; he may discover information suggesting poor quality teaching; or he may unearth comments indicating the tests were administered at an inopportune time. Such information enables him to rationalize the students' poor performances and to maintain a favorable attitude toward the present board members.

The cognitive consistency view of communication discussed above is depicted in FIGURE 1. When viewed from the context of a formal dissemination model, it implies that persuasive messages should be prepared in ways calculated to produce cognitive inconsistency. But in addition, the message strategies employed, as well as the situational milieu in which the messages are embedded, should maximize the likelihood that acceptance of message recommendations will be the preferred

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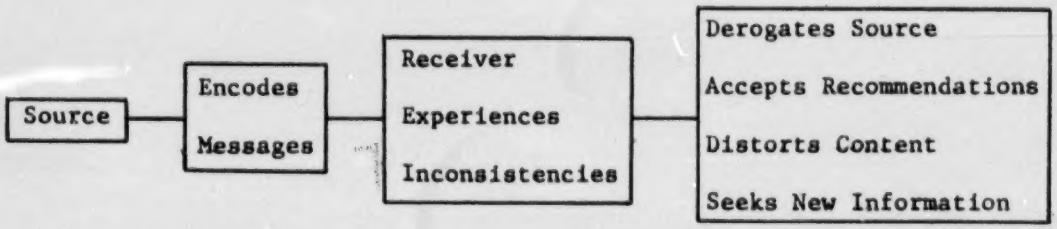
[18]Melvin Manis, "The Interpretation of Opinion Statements As a Function of Recipient Attitude," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 55(1960): 340-345.

mode of inconsistency reduction.

FIGURE 1

A COGNITIVE CONSISTENCY PARADIGM

OF THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS



Another important consideration is suggested by our cognitive consistency approach. Obviously, potential receivers can prevent the onset of cognitive inconsistency by avoiding belief-discrepant information. As we indicated earlier, this process is captured by a construct labeled selective exposure: the tendency of persons to seek out supportive information while avoiding information that is nonsupportive. Thus, if a person agrees, in the form of a vote at the polls, to pay high school taxes, he is likely to attend to messages reinforcing his choice and to avoid messages questioning it--or at least, so says the theory.

At first glance, selective exposure might seem to pose a formidable, if not insurmountable, obstacle for any dissemination model that seeks to reach a broad, heterogeneous public. For the principle suggests that those who are most opposed to educational accountability models, either

in general or in terms of the specific aspects of a given model, are the very persons least likely to attend to messages detailing their advantages. Fortunately, the picture is not that bleak. In recent years, social psychologists and communication researchers have called the concept of selective exposure into serious question, particularly as it applies to selective avoidance of belief-discrepant information. Literature reviews and theoretical discussions by Freedman and Sears,[19] Mills,[20] Sears,[21] and Katz[22] all reach a similar conclusion: empirical support for selective avoidance is scanty, if not nonexistent. McGuire puts the current status of the concept this way:

> The data regarding selective avoidance...seem impressively negative...even published reports give the selective avoidance hypothesis a very poor batting average. Indeed, some of the outcomes are significantly in the direction opposite to that predicted. This poor ratio of confirmation is particularly worrisome to those of us who have become sensitized to the prevalence of experimenter bias, since most of the researchers have been proponents of the postulate and thus the disconfirmations have occurred despite possible biases to the contrary.[23]

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[19]Freedman and Sears, "Selective Exposure," pp. 57-97.

[20]Judson Mills, "Interest in Supporting and Discrepant Information," in Theories of Cognitive Consistency, ed. by Abelson, et al., pp. 771-776.

[21]David O. Sears, "The Paradox of Defacto Selective Exposure Without Preferences for Supportive Information," Ibid., pp. 777-787.

[22]Elihu Katz, "On Reopening the Question of Selectivity in Exposure to Mass Communications," Ibid., pp. 788-796.

[23]William J. McGuire, "Selective Exposure: A Summing Up," Ibid., pp. 797-800.

Thus, if message and diffusion strategies are carefully formulated, there is a good possibility that informative and persuasive messages will reach those who are unfavorably predisposed toward accountability models. Moreover, our discussion thus far assumes that these individuals will be passive recipients of messages generated by others. In the next section of this report, we consider a persuasive technique called counterattitudinal advocacy, a technique that involves individuals in discussing, and in some cases advocating, initially belief-discrepant ideas. We believe that receiver involvement can be used to enhance the effectiveness of a dissemination model.

To say that selective avoidance does not pose as serious a problem as one might initially expect is not intended to minimize the complexity of the communicative tasks associated with the dissemination of information about educational accountability. We have consistently emphasized the heterogeneity of intended target audiences, heterogeneity reflected by sharply differing beliefs, attitudes and values concerning education in general, and accountability models in particular. Moreover, the interests of various target audiences are often in conflict or at least are perceived as being in conflict by members of these groups. Given these psychological circumstances, the opportunities for source derogation and message content distortion are rife. Still, we believe that mechanisms can be built into a formal dissemination model to reduce the frequency of such communication breakdowns, if not to eliminate them. We will discuss some of these mechanisms in the next section of this report.

Learning Theories

Although applications of learning theories to communication situations have been relatively infrequent, several aspects of these theories seem particularly relevant to a formal dissemination model. Perhaps the linkage can best be accomplished by focusing on a theory that deals primarily with social learning. Such a theory is found in Miller and Dollard's social learning model.[24]

Their model contains four major elements: drive, cue, response, and reward. A drive is any strong stimulus that impels action. Obviously, certain drives, such as hunger and sex, have strong physiological components. Here, however, we are primarily concerned with socially learned sources of drive. Thus, the willingness to pay high taxes to support schools stems at least partically from drives rooted in a need for social approval or acceptance. One reason parents contribute financially to the educational system is because others expect "good" parents to behave this way. In return, of course, parents assume that they will realize certain returns from the schools; moreover, if they perceive that these returns are not materializing, they are driven to protest, not only because of financial considerations, but also because society expects them to do so in their roles as "good" parents.

While drives impel responses, cues determine when a person will respond, where he will respond, and which response he will make. In short, a cue is a distinctive environmental stimulus that channels be-

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[24]See: Miller, Neal E. and Dollard, John. Social Learning and Imitation. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1941.

havior. If a parent wishes to protest educational conditions, he is not likely to wander around complaining indiscriminately to everyone. Instead, certain cues will guide his behavior. If a school board member or an administrator enters his environment, they will serve as cues to trigger the parent's complaints. If he cannot identify these cues, he is likely to ask others for assistance--e.g., "Are any of those people the principal?" Furthermore, as a function of prior reward and punishment, some stimuli will acquire cue properties, while others will not. For instance, if an individual is consistently rewarded for criticizing assessment testing programs, those journals, magazines, or newspapers known to be critical of such programs will acquire cue properties for that person. He will select them from among other periodicals (in terms of our previous language, selectively attend to them). By contrast, he will be unlikely to select periodicals that are not usually critical of assessment testing. If he is simply unaware of such periodicals, we would say that they have no cue properties; if he actively rejects them, we would say that the periodicals have cue properties, but that they trigger avoidance responses.

Responses are the behaviors occurring as a result of some drive being instigated. As we have suggested in the previous paragraphs, many of these responses are communicative in nature; they involve sending or receiving messages. Unless some cues are present, the individual will not know exactly when, where, or how to respond. Thus, what is learned in Miller and Dollard's social learning model are linkages between particular patterns of cues and particular responses. The discontented parent learns that specific cue stimuli warrant an attack on assessment testing.

As long as he remains discontented (drive), or until he is no longer rewarded for responding this way in the presence of these cue stimuli, he will continue to complain.

As we have indicated, rewards determine whether responses will be repeated. In the Miller and Dollard paradigm, events are rewarding because they are drive-reducing. Just as food reduces the hunger drive, aggressive communication may result in the reduction of frustration-induced drive. Or such communication may be rewarded by the social approval of others--e.g., "That's the way! You really gave him a piece of your mind!"

One note of caution should be inserted. In complex, higher order learning situations such as those involving communication, it is often difficult to specify the precise stimuli that are drive-producing and the specific events that are perceived as rewarding. Unlike the food deprived rat in a maze who learns to beat a hasty path to the food cup, human beings are motivated by many considerations and differ widely in the things they perceive as rewarding. Consequently, our hypothetical parent may protest testing because of anxiety occasioned by his own child's poor performance, a strong ideological predilection against such tests, the social approval he receives for plying his verbal trade, or a host of other reasons. By the same token, the motivational bases of the behavior will largely determine what events will be perceived as reinforcing. If our parent feels less anxious about his child's performance after attacking testing, if he feels more secure in his ideological biases against such tests, or if he gains the plaudits of

his friends for his verbal acumen, his communication behavior will be rewarded and he will be more likely to repeat it in the presence of a similar pattern of cues.

Use of the phrase "similar pattern of cues" introduces two additional important concepts for a social learning model: stimulus generalization and stimulus discrimination. If it were necessary for cue patterns to be exactly identical before a response would be repeated, little learning could occur and life would be enormously complex. Stimulus generalization ensures that this will not be the case: reward for making a specific response to a given pattern of cues strengthens not only the tendency for that pattern of cues to elicit that response, but also the tendency for other similar patterns of cues to elicit the same response. The more similar the cue pattern, the greater the likelihood of generalization; the less similar the pattern, the less the likelihood of generalization.

Conversely, if people generalized indiscriminately from the original cue pattern to all other patterns, they would be in the bizzare situation of behaving the same way in all situations. A set of discriminations must therefore be learned: by rewarding a response to one pattern of cues and punishing the response to a somewhat different pattern, a discrimination may be gradually established. This tends to increase the specificity of the cue-response connection and to correct maladaptive generalizations.

Again, the application of these two concepts can best be illustrated by returning to the example of our recalcitrant parent. If he has been

rewarded for attacking testing while talking to a school principal, he is likely to launch an assault on it while interacting with an assistant principal or a member of the school board. Although the latter two individuals may differ in many ways from the principal--for example, they may be of a different sex, or they may vary sharply from the principal in age or physical appearance--the cue patterns are similar enough to elicit the original responses. By contrast, if he attends a basketball game at a nearby university, our hypothetical parent is unlikely to institute an attack on assessment testing with the spectator seated next to him while play is progressing on the floor below. Of course, one can conceive of circumstances where the subject might arise; for instance, his neighbor might mention assessment testing in the course of a casual halftime conversation. Still, this possibility is not only remote, it also changes the cue pattern so it more closely resembles the original circumstances under which the behavior occurred.

But in the course of his communicative activities, our parent may also discover that some discriminations are required. Suppose for instance, that he does generalize from his original conversation with the principal to a similar discussion with an assistant principal. Initially, he was rewarded by his friends for taking the principal to task. However, the principal was a male while the assistant principal is a female. Rather than praising him, his friends--good chauvinists to a man--chastise him for leveling such a vigorous verbal attack against a defenseless woman. If their attitude toward him is relatively important, a discrimination will probably be established, and in the future our parent will

refrain from directing attacks on assessment testing at female school officials--or for that matter, at females in general.

Our choice of hypothetical examples should have revealed some ways in which a social learning model can be applied to the problem of developing a formal dissemination model. There is one area, however, in which the constructs employed in the model are of particular importance. From reading the previous literature on accountability models, some of which we summarized in Part I of this report, one fact is readily apparent. Initial attempts to develop such models met with considerable criticism, particularly in the area of assessment. As a result of this criticism, modifications and improvements in these tests have occurred. Despite these changes, criticism, albeit somewhat abated, has continued. We suspect that one explanation for this fact can be found in the rather subtle discriminations that must be learned in order to understand the new situation. Obviously, if these discriminations are to be learned, there must be a thorough program of preparatory and educative communication, particularly for those unschooled in the many intricacies of educational test construction. Unless such discriminations are clearly understood, critics of assessment will merely generalize their responses from the original cue pattern--i.e., the initial program of assessment--to any new ones--i.e., patterns which include relevant changes in testing procedures. While some will probably continue to criticize even after learning the discriminations, we believe the number of detractors can be substantially reduced by a carefully planned program of educational communication, designed to help individuals learn the needed

discriminations. It is primarily within this arena that a social learning model has relevance for a formal dissemination model.

Diffusion "Theory"

Our use of quotation marks to set off "theory" indicates we are using the term loosely; in fact, we are willing to grant that there are no theories of diffusion. Still, considerable research on the diffusion of innovations has yielded several generalizations of import to the development of a formal dissemination model. We will conclude our discussion of the theoretic bases of such a model with a brief examination of these generalizations.

Rogers and Shoemaker identify the crucial elements of the diffusion process as: "(1) the innovation (educational accountability models) (2) which is communicated (messages are constructed) through certain channels (mass media and interpersonal) (3) over time (at this point, roughly four years) (4) among the members of a social system" (and we would emphasize, social subsystems; e.g., school administrators, teachers, testing specialists, parents, etc.).[25] As we have tried to indicate by inserting our bracketed comments within the quotation, dissemination of information about educational accountability models is an exercise in the diffusion of innovations. Perhaps the one key difference from most diffusion problems lies in the fact that we are aiming for individual and collective understanding and acceptance of educational accountability programs, not actual individual adoption.

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[25]Everett M. Rogers and F. Floyd Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations: A Cross-Cultural Approach New York: The Free Press, 1971 , p. 18.

A wealth of research has demonstrated that the rate of adoption of an innovation over time consistently takes the form of an S-shaped curve, with the steepness of the S's slope indicating the rapidity with which adoption occurs.[26] Moreover, literally scores of studies have dealt with the differences between early and late adopters. We will not go into these studies here for we believe this to be an area where the distinction between acceptance and actual adoption may make a difference.[27] Many of the generalizations about early and late adopters have evolved from studies of agricultural innovations in traditional societies. We feel that the present problem is a good deal different: it centers on the acceptance of an educational innovation by relatively sophisticated, well-educated groups of people located in a modern highly industrialized society. When we move to actual development of a formal dissemination model in our next report, we will try to cull out those generalizations about adopters that may have relevance for the problem at hand.

One potentially crucial generalization concerns the relationship between information about an innovation and openness to persuasion concerning the desirability of its adoption: almost invariably, information precedes persuasion. We have repeatedly indicated that we see the lack

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[26]See, for example: Rogers, Everett M. The Diffusion of Innovations. Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1962; Rogers, Everett M. and Svenning, Lynne. Modernization Among Peasants: The Impact of Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969; or Rogers and Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations (previously cited).

[27]For a summary of these studies, see Rogers and Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations, pp. 352-376.

of preparatory, educative communication as a major barrier to the acceptance of educational accountability models. While we do not view such preparatory communication as a panacea, we do regard it as a minimal condition for wide-spread acceptance.

Research on the diffusion of innovations also reveals the importance of opinion leaders in the adoption process.[28] Opinion leaders are significant others, persons who are sought out for advice and information in a nutshell, people whose opinions count. If a broad-scale dissemination program is to succeed, identification of opinion leaders within various target audiences becomes essential. Intensive efforts to communicate with these individuals, particularly at the interpersonal level, will probably yield greater payoffs than a costly mass media program. Again, involvement in program planning appears to be a key variable, for these opinion leaders are more likely to accept crucial dimensions of an accountability program if they have been actively involved in their conception.

Consider, for instance, our target audience of educational testing specialists. With little difficulty, one should be able to identify important opinion leaders, both at the national and state levels. If these persons are consulted and used in the development and revision of assessment testing programs, their influence on other members of this target audience--and for that matter, related professional audiences--should be considerable.

Finally, the indispensibility of opinion leaders is also docu-

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[28]See: Rogers and Shoemaker, Communication of Innovations.

mented by the role of homophyly in the diffusion process. "Homophyly is the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar in certain attributes, such as beliefs, values, social status, and the like. In a free-choice situation, when a source can interact with any one of a number of receivers, there is a strong tendency for him to select a receiver who is most like himself."[29] Most important, more effective communication occurs when source and receiver are homophylous.

Upon recalling our discussion of the assumptions that meanings are in people and reality is subjective, as well as our examination of cognitive consistency theories, the preceding conclusion is hardly surprising. Actually, in developing a formal dissemination model for information dealing with educational accountability programs, we have a potential advantage that has not been present in much of the research on diffusion of innovations. In that research, it has often been difficult to identify opinion leaders and change agents who are homophylous with the intended message receivers. As we have indicated by example, this lack of homophyly is not--or at least, does not have to be--an acute difficulty in the present situation. Judicious identification of opinion leaders within the various relevant groups of receivers can produce the homophylous source-receivers relationship essential to effective communication.

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[29] Ibid.

CHAPTER III

EMPIRICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A FORMAL DISSEMINATION MODEL

Having considered the assumptive and theoretical bases of a formal dissemination model, we turn finally to some of the empirical foundations of such a model. In this section, then, we are primarily concerned with identifying some important variables entering into a dissemination model and then examining some of the relevant research findings relating to these variables.

Source Credibility

We have emphasized the importance of credibility for effective communication at several points in our paper. In underscoring its significance, we are echoing the injunctions of countless other communication theorists who have emphasized the crucial role played by certain source characteristics in the communication effectiveness equation. Aristotle labeled one of his three modes of proof ethos, or ethical appeal. Ethos was viewed as several personal characteristics of the communicator (roughly, good sense, good morals, and good will) necessary for effective communication. More recently, students of communication have used the term credibility to refer to these perceived source traits. Current phrases such as "credibility gap" and "image building" reflect our awareness of the necessity of creating a favorable picture of the source. All this concern, of course, stems from acceptance of the commonsense premise: who the source is makes a difference in the degree to which receivers accept what is communicated.

Early communication research on source credibility sought principally to demonstrate that differences in credibility do influence communication effectiveness.[30] Typically, two groups of similar receivers were exposed to an identical communication, both in terms of content and presentation, dealing with some aspect of a controversial issue. Preceding exposure to the message, one group of receivers would be led to believe that the source was a highly respected scientist, educator, or government official (High Credibility Condition), while the other might be informed that the source was a political turncoat who adapted his views to suit his own self-interests (Low Credibility Condition). Following their exposure to the message, the attitudes of both groups of receivers toward the source's position were measured and compared to determine which situation was more persuasive. Not surprisingly, almost all of the early research indicated that greater attitude change occurred among receivers exposed to a high-credibility source. Because other dimensions of the situation were held constant, it was concluded that high source credibility produced greater influence.

Because the term credibility is broad and ambiguous, there has been a great deal of interest in determining just what personal characteristics are of paramount importance. In early studies, the dimensions of credibility were usually dictated by the researcher; the researcher decided which traits were likely to affect the perceived credibility of

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[30]Carl I. Hovland and Walter Weiss, "The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness, "Public Opinion Quarterly 15(1951): 635-650.

the source and then prepared information for the receivers that aimed at manipulating those traits. Most frequently, the traits of competence and trustworthiness were chosen as crucial determinants of credibility.

While these choices probably seem sensible, the preceding method has one potential shortcoming: the traits selected by the researcher may not be the ones most receivers deem important. After all, as our subjective reality assumption reminds us, people do respond to situations differently. Our confidence in this early credibility research could therefore be buttressed by demonstrating that people in general view competence and trustworthiness as important constituents of credibility. Moreover, such a broad sampling of people's perceptions would provide the grounds for better advice to communicators who are concerned about the traits influencing their own credibility. Such a consideration is particularly important when the task at hand is construction of a broadly-based formal dissemination model designed to reach large, heterogeneous groups of receivers.

Studies by Andersen, McCroskey, Sarbaugh, Whitehead, and Berlo, Lemert and Mertz have provided this broad, empirical look at the dimensions of source credibility.[31] All of these studies used a similar

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[31]See: Anderson, Kenneth E. "An Experimental Study of the Interaction of Artistic and Nonartistic Ethos in Persuasion." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1961; McCroskey, James C. "Scales for the Measurement of Ethos." Speech Monographs 28(1966): 65-72; Sarbaugh, Lawrence E. "Generality of the Dimensions of Source Evaluation Across Language/Culture Systems." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1967; Whitehead, Jack L., Jr. "Factors of Source Credibility." Quarterly Journal of Speech 54(1968): 59-63; Berlo, David K., Lemert, James, and Mertz, Robert J. "Dimensions for Evaluating the Acceptability of Message Sources." Public Opinion Quarterly 33(1970): 83-91.

method: a sizable sample of individuals was asked to rate numerous prominent sources on a large number of scales bounded by descriptive adjectives--e.g., trained-untrained, honest-dishonest, or bold-timid. These ratings were then analyzed by means of a statistical technique called factor analysis. This technique groups subsets of the scales into related clusters, and by examining the scales that cluster together, inferences can be made about the dimensions used to assess credibility.

The results of all these studies are encouragingly consistent. While the researchers use somewhat different labels to describe the credibility dimensions, the two strongest factors emerging from all the studies can appropriately be labeled competence and trustworthiness. In addition, there is some evidence for a dynamism dimension--a characteristic relating to the source's extrovertedness and aggressiveness--and for a sociability dimension--a characteristic relating to the source's friendliness. However, these latter factors are neither as consistent nor as robust as the competence and trustworthiness dimensions.

When coupled with the large body of research demonstrating that credibility has a marked impact on communication effectiveness, the studies on dimensions of credibility convey several important implications for development of a formal dissemination model. First, the model should allow for considerable communication which aims entirely at credibility formation. While terms such as "image building" may have acquired negative connotations, there is no disputing the importance of laying a groundwork of favorable source perceptions--nor for that matter, is there any need for apology for attempting to enhance source credibility,

as long as the techniques employed are ethically defensible and as long as sources are associated with messages containing sound, intelligent content. Examination of prior messages relating to educational accountability reveals a great deal of concern for communicating information, but few attempts to establish credibility. To return to our assumptive foundations of the dissemination model, adherence to a receiver-oriented, behavioral effects view of communicative purpose, rather than a message construction perspective, suggests that some messages should be transmitted solely for the purpose of establishing the source's credibility--whether that source is an individual opinion leader or a collectivity of individuals, such as an educational agency.

Moreover, some of the feedback loops in the model should aim primarily at assessing various target audiences' perceptions of the sources generating messages about educational accountability. It would be an oversimplification to solicit feedback only on receivers' awareness of information, important though that question may be. In addition, effective communication hinges on the availability of data concerning the ways that communication sources are perceived. While source assessment is particularly relevant to the acceptance of accountability programs, it also bears on the understanding of such programs, for low source credibility may result in the kind of distortion and avoidance of message content discussed in the earlier section of this report dealing with cognitive consistency theories. Since information is a necessary prerequisite for acceptance and since attention to, and accurate processing of, information are facilitated by favorable receiver perceptions of the

message source, an effective dissemination model must provide mechanisms for evaluating the impact sources.

Receiver Involvement

Throughout this report, we have stressed the importance of receiver involvement in the communication process, arguing that prior dissemination strategies have failed to take adequate account of this factor and contending that an effective dissemination model must provide numerous opportunities for such involvement. Receiver involvement enhances the effectiveness of communication in at least two ways: at a general level, it fosters receiver understanding of, and commitment to accountability program procedures and objectives; more specifically, it permits use of such proven persuasive techniques as counterattitudinal advocacy. Let us consider each of these communicative advantages in turn.

There can be little doubt that commitment to a program or policy, particularly when that commitment is public, both heightens attitudinal favorability toward the policy and confers considerable resistance to persuasive attempts aimed at changing these attitudes.[32] Obviously, participation in communicative activities provides one of the best means for eliciting public commitment, for unless they are talking to themselves, people's verbal behaviors are public commodities. Notwithstanding the fact that our society has its share of cliches aimed at downgrading the importance of "talk" (e.g., "Put up or shut up!" or "Talk's cheap!"),

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[32]See: McGuire, William J. "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change." Vol. III of Handbook of Social Psychology. Edited by Gardner Lindzey and Elliot Aronson. 2nd ed. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969 and Miller, Gerald R. and Burgoon, Michael. New Techniques of Persuasion. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

many of the impressions others gain about us are arrived at through our communicative acts. Thus, when we publicly declare our allegiance to a particular person or program--i.e., when we publicly commit ourselves--this declaration itself has the effect of "freezing" our attitudes and making us less tractable to others' persuasive blandishments.

Early research on the effects of group versus individual decision-making, provided one of the first indications of the motivational impact of commitment.[33] Thus, in his classic study conducted during World War II, Lewin tested the relative efficacy of individual and group decision-making when the issue involved persuading people to eat what were then perceived as relatively undesirable organ meats, such as liver, sweetbreads, or kidneys. In the Individual Condition, people heard a prepared lecture on the advantages of eating these meats, after which they were dismissed. In the Group Condition, persons not only heard the lecture, but discussed it afterward. Before leaving, each was asked to indicate whether he or she planned to purchase any of the recommended meats. Several weeks later, all the participants in the study were contacted and queried as to whether they had bought any organ meats. Of those responding affirmatively, a great many more had participated in group decision-making, the condition in which all persons were asked to make a public commitment regarding their intentions to purchase organ meats.

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[33]Edith Bennett, "Discussion, Decision, Commitment, and Consensus in 'Group Decisions,'" Human Relations 8(1955): 251-274 and Kurt Lewin, "Group Decision and Social Change," in Basic Studies in Social Psychology, ed. by Harold Proshansky and Bernard Seidenberg New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966, pp. 423-437.

Later studies have examined the effects of specific message commitments on an individual's attitudes and behaviors.[34] Without exception, these studies reveal that when a person publicly states a position, he becomes more resistant to persuasive attacks leveled by opponents of the position. Two studies even suggest that commitment can be induced externally, that if someone else preannounces to a receiver that others believe he has a certain initial attitude, the receiver will be more resistant to messages aimed at changing the attitude.[35] Salesmen, of course, have known of this phenomenon for a long time. The successful salesman never says, "I don't suppose you'd like to buy...," but rather, "I'm certain you'd like to buy...".

These commitment studies have clear implications for development of a formal dissemination model. Obviously, the crucial consideration is one of receiver involvement. Participation in the development of accountability programs necessitates numerous overt behaviors, both communicative and non-communicative. Moreover, if activities are carefully

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[34]See: Kiesler, Charles A. and Sakumura, Joseph. "A Test of A Model for Commitment." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 3(1966): 349-353 and Kiesler, Charles A. The Psychology of Commitment. New York: Academic Press, 1971.

[35]Milton E. Rosenbaum and Isaiah M. Zimmerman, "The Effect of External Commitment on Responses to An Attempt to Change Opinions," Public Opinion Quarterly 23(1959): 247-254 and Milton E. Rosenbaum and Douglas E. Franc, "Opinion Change As A Function of External Commitment and Amount of Discrepancy from the Opinion of Another," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 61(1960): 15-20.

structured, many of these behaviors will reflect the receiver's public commitment to certain dimensions of the program. Such active involvement is likely to bear considerably greater persuasive fruits than a communication strategy which relegates the receiver solely to the role of passive message recipient.

But development of a dissemination model which provides opportunities for active receiver involvement also has another advantage: it permits judicious use of the persuasive technique of counterattitudinal advocacy. This technique, which has received wide attention by social psychologists and communication researchers in the past two decades relies upon the individual persuading himself, rather than being persuaded by another.[36] People are involved in situations which require them to take positions that are at odds with their attitudes--a kind of devil's advocate position. In a variety of situations, such active counterattitudinal participation results in the person acquiring a more favorable attitude toward the initially belief-discrepant position.

Several explanations have been offered for the persuasive efficacy of counterattitudinal advocacy. One explanation, grounded in the consistency theories position discussed above, holds that the cognitions, I believe x," and "I am publicly advocating non-x," are psychologically

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[36]See: McGuire, William J. "The Nature of Attitudes and Attitude Change" (previously cited); Miller, Gerald R. "Counterattitudinal Advocacy: A Current Appraisal." Advances in Communication Research. Edited by C. David Mortensen and Kenneth K. Sereno. New York: Harper and Row, 1973; and Miller, Gerald R. and Burgoon, Michael. New Techniques of Persuasion (previously cited).

inconsistent. A possible avenue for reducing inconsistency lies in modifying the first cognition; i.e., in deciding to adopt a less favorable attitude toward "x." Studies such as those of Festinger and Carlsmith and Cohen provide support for this consistency theory interpretation.[37]

A second interpretation has been labeled incentive theory.[38] This explanation, rooted in a learning theory perspective, holds that when a person is asked to assume a counterattitudinal stance, he becomes motivated to assess arguments in a different light. Rather than thoughtlessly dismissing belief-discrepant arguments, he is forced to weigh them more carefully and to consider their favorable dimensions. As a result of engaging in this altered perceptual scanning of arguments, the individual modifies his initial attitude.

While the intricacies of these theoretical controversies have implications for the development of a dissemination model, they need not be discussed in detail at this time. What they do suggest is that

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[37]Leon Festinger and J. Merrill Carlsmith, "Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 58(1959): 203-210; Jack W. Brehm and Arthur R. Cohen, Explorations in Cognitive Dissonance New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1962 , pp. 73-78.

[38]Irving L. Janis and Barnard J. Gilmore, "The Influence of Incentive Conditions on the Success of Role Playing in Modifying Attitudes," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 1(1965): 17-27; Allen C. Elms and Irving L. Janis, "Counter Norm Attitudes Induced by Consonant Versus Dissonant Conditions of Role Playing," Journal of Experimental Research in Personality 1(1965): 50-60.

counterattitudinal advocacy can be used to communicative advantage. By asking opponents of educational accountability programs to engage in an open-minded discussion of the advantages of such programs, it may be possible to modify and even to change initially negative attitudes. Such an approach would have particular merit in interpersonal communication settings, say for example, in situations where one is trying to elicit the support of a potentially powerful opinion leader. By combining the use of counterattitudinal advocacy with other communication strategies discussed in this report, the overall effectiveness of a formal dissemination model is likely to be increased.

CONCLUSION

In this portion of our report, we have set forth the assumptive, theoretical, and empirical foundations of an effective formal dissemination model, a model to be developed in our next report. While we have treated the three areas separately, they are obviously intimately related: one's basic assumptions about human communication give rise to certain theoretical preferences, and in turn, these theories stand or fall as a result of empirical research.

Although we believe that we have identified some useful tools to aid in construction of a dissemination model, we realize that much remains unknown about the complex process of human communication. Because of this fact, the assumptions, theories, and constructs detailed in this report must still be put to the acid test. And in order to assign a grade to each of them, continuous monitoring and evaluation of the model will be a necessity. As we have stressed throughout this report, feedback is an indispensable ingredient of any successful communication venture, and development of a formal dissemination model constitutes no exception to this rule.

APPENDIX A

SELECTED ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Following are several selections for the reader interested in pursuing communication theory to greater lengths. The listing is abbreviated and selective, consisting for the most part of introductory works.

1. Berlo, David K. The Process of Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961.

   One of the first attempts to examine human communication from a behavioral vantage point. Of particular interest are the book's consistent receiver orientation and the analysis of the concept of meaning.

2. Bois, J. Samuel. Communication as Creative Experience. Los Angeles: Viewpoints Institute, 1968.

   Offers a general semantics orientation toward human communication. Contains a short, interesting discussion of man as a communicating organism.

3. Borden, George A. An Introduction to Human-Communication Theory. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Publishers, 1971.

   Deals with both cognitive and behavioral processes central to human communication.

4. Karlins, Melvin and Abelson, Herbert I. Persuasion: How Opinions and Attitudes are Changed, 2nd ed. New York: Springer, 1970.

   Lists research generalizations that may be used by the communication practitioner in constructing persuasive messages. Generalizations are accompanied by specimen research studies.

5. Miller, Gerald R. An Introduction to Speech Communication. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972.

   Contains a discussion of the purpose of communication, the concept of process and its importance to communication, and the role of models in the study of communication, all written from a behavioral vantage point.

6. Miller, Gerald R. and Burgoon, Michael. New Techniques of Persuasion. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

   Examines techniques for inducing resistance to persuasion and considers the use of role-playing and counterattitudinal advocacy as persuasive strategies.

7. Zimbardo, Philip and Ebbesen, Ebbe B. Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1969.

A clearly written introduction to persuasive communication. A strong point of the book is its use of case studies to illustrate how research can be applied to questions of practical persuasive strategy.